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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of selected stakeholders about the impact of returning to a district-wide neighborhood school structure after having been under a federal desegregation mandate (involving busing) since the 1970s. It focuses on data from interviews with African American and white elementary school teachers. The interviews asked about their ideal neighborhood school structure and program; support that would be needed to implement an effective structure and program; benefits of a neighborhood school structure; concerns about the impact of the new organizational structure on the students, community, and teachers; and how multicultural education would be affected by the new organizational structure. Data analysis found that several themes recurred across the five questions: understanding the significance of school-community relationships; providing for teacher support and inclusion in administrative decisions; keeping the focus on students; providing equitable conditions; increasing teacher knowledge; understanding the essence of multicultural education; and appreciating the pivotal role played by the school administration. Recommendations include: keep teachers involved in decision making; create a formal system for developing school-community relationships; provide teacher professional development; train in multicultural education; create a family-centered environment; and make student welfare the basis for all decisions. (SM)

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PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT RETURNING TO A NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL STRUCTURE

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Perceptions of Teachers, Administrators, and Community Members About Returning to a Neighborhood School Structure

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the inquiry was to investigate the perceptions and perspectives of selected stakeholders about the impact of returning to a district-wide neighborhood school organizational structure, after having been under a federal desegregation mandate, since the 1970s, which involved busing children across town in order to satisfy the mandate.

This report, which is the first of a series to emerge from the inquiry, focuses only on the findings of the interviews with teachers. The interviews given by the school administrators and community members are still being transcribed and analyzed; in total, there were 23 participants (16 females [5 African American, 9 European American], 7 males, [3 African American, 4 European American]), of which 14 were teachers. The focus of the

inquiry centered on the interviewees' perceptions of: a) an ideal neighborhood school structure and program; b) support that would be needed to implement an effective structure and program; c) the benefits of a neighborhood school structure; d) concerns about the impact of the new organizational structure on the students, community, and teachers; and e) how multicultural education will be affected by the new organizational structure.

Context

The school district is located in the southern part of Mississippi, serving a city of approximately 48,000 people, and has a student enrollment which is approximately 65-70% African American and 30-35% European American and other ethnic groups. The socioeconomic composition of the school district and surrounding communities ranges from very poor to very rich. There are two large, religiously affiliated, private schools located in the city, and the already significant number of home school situations is increasing steadily.

In response to a proposal made by a biracial group of parents, the school district successfully petitioned for

permission to return to a district-wide neighborhood school organizational structure. The racial composition of students attending city schools at the beginning of desegregation was approximately 60% African American and 40% European American; as years passed, increasing numbers of European American parents chose to send their children to private schools or moved to surrounding communities whose student population was predominantly European American, which changed the racial composition of the student body to approximately 75% African American and 25% European American. The biracial group of parents stated that the request to return to a district-wide neighborhood school structure was based primarily on (a) the increasing economic problems faced by the city as a result of "white flight," (b) the belief that educational equity, which had been achieved as a result of desegregation, would be maintained, and (c) the opinion that it is important for children to attend elementary schools in their own neighborhoods.

Under the new structure, which was to be implemented at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school

year, the school district would have six neighborhood elementary schools serving students in grades K-6, one middle school, one ninth-grade school, and one high school to accommodate all students in the district. The student population in three of the six neighborhood elementary schools would be 90+% African American. School officials hoped that, over time, the new neighborhood school structure at the elementary level would encourage parents, whose children were attending private schools, to enroll their children in the public schools.

Methodology

Selection of Participants

The participants in the study were selected purposefully. Their experience, perspectives, and roles in the restructuring process were considered in order to get in-depth information and opinions as well as unique and varied points of view.

The teacher participants in this study were working at an elementary school located in a geographical area that may be described as an economically depressed area of the

city. Of the 680 students attending this school, approximately 98% were African American and were eligible for the free or reduced-lunch program. The average class size was approximately 28 students, with a total of 22 teachers and 12 assistant teachers being employed at the school. Other personnel employed at the school included a Principal, an Assistant Principal, a counselor, a librarian, a HOSTS teacher, special education teachers, a speech/language teacher, a gifted/talented teacher, a physical education teacher, and a music teacher.

All interviewees volunteered to participate in the inquiry. Of the 14 teachers (5 African American, 9 European American) interviewed, one was currently serving as an administrative intern. The teachers' years of teaching experience ranged from six months to 27 years, with the average for the group being 9.43 years, and their years of teaching in the Hattiesburg schools ranged from six months to 25 years, with the average for the group being 5.46 years. All teachers were teaching in grades K-4, with four teachers' assignments being specialty areas (i.e., music, library, gifted education, and the day treatment

program). Five of the 14 teachers held Master's degrees and one of the teachers held National Board Teacher Certification. All of the teachers had received their teaching degrees from colleges and universities located in Mississippi.

Data Collection Methods

We conducted the interviews at the school site. Interviewees signed a consent form to be tape-recorded. Interviewees completed a form containing demographic information but individuals' names were not included. Tapes were transcribed by an experienced transcriber who received pay for the service.

In our interviews with the teachers, we were searching for answers to five questions:

1. What is your perception of an ideal neighborhood school structure/program in terms of the students, the community, the teachers?

2. What support from the community, the administration, professional development, the curriculum, materials, or other resources do you think teachers will need to ensure effective academic and affect programs for students?

3. How do you think the students, community, and teachers will benefit from the change to a neighborhood school structure?

4. What concerns do you have about the impact of this restructuring on the students, community and/or teachers?

5. What is the multicultural curriculum that is currently being implemented and how will the new school organization affect this?

Data Analysis

The five questions provided an organizational framework for analyzing the interviews using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The units of analysis were consequently identified as (a) ideal neighborhood school, (b) support for teachers, (c) benefits, (d) concerns, and (e) multicultural curriculum.

We read transcriptions and highlighted responses for each of the five units of analysis and compiled responses from all interviewees for each of the five units of analysis. Responses for each of the five units of analysis were read and coded according to the themes/concepts that represented the responses; also, emergent data were noted. The responses representing each theme/concept were reexamined to ensure that appropriate interpretations had been made, to unify synonymous themes/concepts, and to

identify sub-themes; multiple perspectives about a given theme were noted.

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity or trustworthiness and reliability or consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 288), were ensured through the triangulation methods of (a) having two investigators code and analyze the data, (b) using multiple interviewees as sources of information, and (c) examining the plausibility of the findings in relation to the phenomena under investigation. The established audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1983, and Dey, 1993) and the assumptions, perspectives, and experience of the investigators were reported which added assurance that the analysis and interpretation of the findings were dependable.

The investigation was conducted in an ethical manner. The participants were assured of anonymity as real names are not used, and all interview tapes were destroyed after being transcribed.

Perspectives of Investigators

Each of the three investigators has worked and taught in diverse environments for more than 20 years. Two

of the investigators are European American females, both of whom have doctoral degrees in education. One of the female investigators is British born, was raised in Hong Kong, and has taught in five countries; the second female investigator taught in all-Black schools prior to integration, has taught in integrated schools, and has taught Choctaw students at the Choctaw Reservation in Mississippi. The third investigator is an African American male who has a doctoral degree in sociology and extensive experience in community program development. These factors lend credibility to their ability to judge the authenticity and plausibility of the research findings.

Findings and Discussion

Overview

Several themes recurred across the five questions. The recurring themes included the significance of school-community relationships, teacher support and inclusion in administrative decisions, keeping the focus on the students, equitable conditions, increasing teacher knowledge and understanding about the essence of multicultural education,

and the pivotal role played by the school administration. Regardless of the question asked, the importance of a mutually beneficial school-community partnership was emphasized, including collaborations both within and between neighborhoods. A persistent idea throughout the interviews was that teachers need support in a variety of ways and that they should be included in planning for change and in assessing the outcomes. There were repeated comments by teachers about keeping the focus on the emotional and academic development of students. An underlying concept across the five questions was that the unique needs of each neighborhood school must be taken into consideration in order for equitable conditions to be maintained. The comments of the teachers about what constitutes multicultural education varied considerably, indicating the need for staff development in this area. The multiplicity of ways in which the school administration must support the teachers, the students, and the community emanated from the teacher's responses. Collectively, these six recurring themes suggest some implications for school

districts when considering a transition into a neighborhood school structure.

Question 1: What is your perception of an ideal neighborhood school structure/program in terms of the students, the community, the teachers?

Seven themes emerged from the teachers' responses to the question about their perception of an ideal neighborhood school, and of these, the most frequently mentioned were (a) adequate and equitable financing, (b) school-community partnerships, (c) support for teachers, and (d) safety and emotional support for students. The teachers believed that an ideal neighborhood school system would have adequate financing, providing enough money to support basic programs to meet a range of students' needs. In addition, they want the financing to be equitable, taking into account the needs of each individual school, and recognizing that some schools have greater needs than others. One teacher said, "I know so often when you do go to neighborhood schools, sometimes one school seems to get favored over another school."

The school-community partnership theme involved the idea that in an ideal neighborhood school there would

exist a mutually beneficial partnership between the school and the community. The school would offer services to families and the general community, for example, "...we need, like, a busing system that could stay like an hour or two after school and then take them home, you know?" and at the same time the community would offer time, effort and expertise to the school.

> We need the parents to be able to come in a lot more than they are now, and maybe with the school being in the neighborhood, or having a neighborhood school, maybe they will come in, you know, a little bit more. Maybe that will possibly increase that interaction between parent and school and the community as well. Maybe we can get more impact from the community by the school being a neighborhood school. Maybe the people outside looking in, maybe they will want to come in, more than what they are now.

The teachers expressed the notion that in this ideal neighborhood school setting, the teachers would be supported by the administration. This support would be in the form of the time and mentorship needed for both planning instructional activities and for dealing with the change and challenges inherent in the teaching profession. They also stated that in such a environment, the

administration would recognize the importance of networking between educators. The purpose of the latter being to exchange and generate ideas, and to get mutual support.

For several teachers, the concept of an ideal neighborhood school being identified by the students as a place of physical safety, where they would receive emotional support was important. One of the teachers explained it this way:

> [I] believe that an ideal neighborhood school would be one where children, first of all, feel comfortable. Where they come in, they enter into an atmosphere that's safe. That's considering the things that are going on now. That's the most important thing - for them to come to a place where they can, at least, feel safe. At least feel that people care for them, that although they have to abide by the rules or act accordingly, I guess should say, but at the same time, feel like that they can talk to their administrators, teachers, and just feel like their learning environment is a learning environment, and not a hostile area for them to come, when they're away from home. Also, where they are allowed the opportunity to communicate among their peers in positive ways.

In such a school, the teachers and administrators would display positive and genuine acceptance of each student and interest in their well being.

The three other themes were mentioned by fewer teachers. The first of these is the need for committed teachers for whom teaching goes beyond the academic boundaries of the school day, becoming a holistic and autonomous understanding of the teaching/learning continuum. The second is the theme of the school-sponsored program, which they believe must be student-centered. The third is the contention that an ideal neighborhood school would engender feelings of ownership and pride in the community and would become a center for neighborhood activities, resulting in increased interaction between families, school personnel, and other members of the surrounding community.

Of the fourteen teachers interviewed, four sets of responses did not directly address the issue of an ideal neighborhood school. Of these four, two were young first-year teachers, who expressed an inability to visualize what a neighborhood school would be like, as they had never

experienced such a structure. One of these young teachers said, "Well, I don't know. But you know, I've seen it on TV or on movies: these little schools with the little kids and they're walking and they have their bikes going to school."

Question 2: What support from the community, the administration, professional development, the curriculum, materials, or other resources do you think teachers will need to ensure effective academic and affect programs for students?

Four major categories of support needed by the teachers were identified, a) professional development, b) administrative and district support, c) community support, and d) professional educators' network. The first three of these had associated sub-themes: the sub-themes associated with professional development were the need to address the specific needs of individual neighborhood schools, prepare teachers to work with special needs students, and also to prepare them for the school reorganization. The contention that professional development topics should be based on the context and particular needs of each school was iterated by several teachers. One of those teachers expressed it this way:

> But as far as staff development, we need staff development that meets the needs of the teachers at J_____[School], the resources that we have at J_____[School]. Let us develop that for the teachers who are here. The teachers at J_____[School] know the students, know how they learn in their classrooms, and know what type staff development they need at the school.

Two teachers felt that additional preparation was needed to prepare all educators for collaboration in inclusion classrooms: "...what we found when we went into inclusion was that our teachers just, our regular ed teachers, just felt so totally unprepared for the whole experience..."; also one teacher strongly expressed the opinion that teachers would need specific guidance to help them adapt to the cultural climate of an unfamiliar neighborhood in which they might teach. She put it this way:

> They thought..., "Oh, that teacher is coming over here to my house." And they're not always open to that because, some are just hostile, but a big majority are, I'm going to say, the majority of them are embarrassed. And teachers need to develop some strategies and some skills for going into a home that's not like theirs. Teachers need to understand that you know you may go and sit on the couch and basically fall to the floor. Or, you know, you may be afraid to sit back because there's a roach crawling down the wall. You know, you have to—. And it's

> very hard, but you have to develop or have some skills in place, some strategies in place so that you make that person sitting on the other side of that sofa or the other side of that table feel comfortable enough with you in their home to talk with you. And that is not an easy thing to do. You know. It's easy to say, it's easy for some, some people to say, "Girl, I see you have problems with roaches, too. You need to get you some Bengal Spray." Or, "Get you some of this, or get you some of that."
>
> Now, you can say that and it can be, "Girl, tell me where I can get that from?" Or, you can say that and a person feels like you are pitying them, so teachers need to—. You have to be able—. And it's just a tone in your voice. You have to be able to—. You have to have some strategies and some skills for doing that. You have to be able to, or know that you may go on a home visit and end up actually conducting the visit on the top of your car or standing on the porch or standing out at the street. And you have to, you know, let that person know, in some sort of way, that you're comfortable and you want them to be comfortable, too. And that you don't think you're better than they are because of your living conditions.

Four sub-themes were associated with the category coded as administrative and district support; these were (a) teacher autonomy and flexibility, (b) motivational reinforcement, (c) support from personnel and financial

assistance, and (d) organizing to provide peer support. The first three were mentioned by an equal number of teachers.

The teachers felt that the administration could best support their autonomy and flexibility by honoring their curricular and pedagogical decisions as well as their classroom management and discipline procedures. A point made about curricular decisions was; "The encouragement to be flexible. If the curriculum one, two, three doesn't work with that situation, to be able to pull in something else that does work...We need that support." With regard to the support over discipline decisions, one teacher said, "That's the biggest problem - having to deal with discipline and not having the parents to support you and not having the principal to also back you up is a concern."

The administration could motivate and reinforce the teachers by being enthusiastic, positive, and congratulatory toward them. Several teachers made points similar to the following:

> We need motivation from them [the administration]. And teachers need the pat on the back. You know. Simply saying, "You're doing a good job." You know. And they need to be observed by the higher-up.

> You know, come through once a month and see every teacher. I know that's a lot. If the top person can't do it, you know, then the assistant. Someone so you'll know. You know, we like to be appreciated.

The teachers also stated that adequate funds need to be provided to recruit competent teaching assistants;

> I think the teacher assistants need to be paid more, in order to bring in more quality people and to keep quality people. You know, when you're making minimum wage, and, you know, teacher assistants, once they have ten years in, they don't make any more money. They don't get raises and things like that, and I don't think that's how we can lure quality people into our system.

and, to ensure the provision of necessary classroom supplies:

> ...I can go and get things from like Wal-Mart and places like that, but I don't know, sometimes I could use, because I come out of my pocket, even with the money that we get, we come out of our pockets so much, getting things...I could use more financial support...

The three teachers that were interviewed as a focus group and one other teacher felt that the teachers would be greatly assisted if they were able to collaborate and plan during the school day. What was most important, one teacher asserted, was "having the support from a team..."

The third category of responses to this question addressed support for the teachers from the community. There were three sub-themes related to this category; the first dealt with formal community participation and mentorship in which a structure was developed for implementing involvement by community businesses, organizations, and individuals.

> I mean they just come, and their guys go into the classes and read, or, like they came and did, they kept the cafeteria for the teachers to go take a break, you know, just doing things like that. What we're wanting our community to do is rather than just, "Here's some money. Use it. Whatever," is to actually physically get involved in the process and become real mentors for our students, and I see us moving more into that,...

The next two were mentioned equally often, and they were the need for all agencies interested in improving education to form a liaison to promote the welfare of the neighborhood schools,

> Well, I would really like—and this is kind of a dream of mine, is that, I would love to see the university and, you know, College, and our schools embrace each other. And I think we've really, in the last two years, I've seen that happening to a very good degree. I just am real excited about the practicum students

> coming, and I just feel like we could do even more...and we really, we can utilize many of you as professors, as professionals, and, you know, authorities in your field, to come and help us, because we've got so much to learn,...

and also the need to effectively use the existing community network system to disseminate correct information about the school, to obtain feedback, and to encourage community involvement:

> In the African-American community, the church is the most important part of their lives. If the church knows what's going on, the children and the parents get it from there, but there are some children that the parents do not attend church, but for some reason it filters out into the community. So the churches need to be—. Not to teach religion. No, but to let their congregation of people know that, "Hey, this is a good learning that's going on in that school." You know. I don't want you to get me wrong, because—.

The final category in response to this question was addressed by one teacher, who has National Board certification, and she said that a good source of support for the teachers would be through a network of professional educators. This, she believes, would give local teachers the opportunity to interact with fellow educators around the

world, thereby obtaining new ideas and sharing experiences.

Question 3: How do you think the students, community, and teachers will benefit from the change to a neighborhood school structure?

In response to this question, the two most frequently mentioned themes were those of simplifying family routines and community ownership. The former would come about because all the elementary age children in a family would attend the same school which would be close to home. The latter came about from the hope that people in the community would say;...sort of like, "This is our school, and we're going to have to look out for our school, because if we don't, you know, then how can we expect someone else to come in and look out for our school. And the students are here. These are our children." The benefit of potentially smaller schools and continuity for the children were cited almost as often. Two teachers expressed uncertainty about the possible benefits; as one of them said;

> This will be the first time I've been in a school that is structured, you know, as a

> community-based school, so I really don't have an answer for that, yet. I don't know. I feel like, from hearing what other teachers and professionals have said, that have been in those situations; they really seem to feel that it's a real positive thing.

One teacher saw the school becoming a service to the community, saying:

> I think there are a lot of parents in this community that need encouragement to do their GED. And I think that if they see, - to get their high school education, - I think if we could offer, bring the adult ed. classes to the individual schools. We might have to teach reading. We might have to teach basic, basic things, so their parents can say, "Well, I'm going to school, too, to get my education." The children can say, "Hey, you know, this is a part of me." And the school could be the shining star of the community.

Yet another teacher believed that one particular benefit would be the opportunity for renewal, saying:

> ...it's also kind of exciting to have a new team and building a team...to start fresh and try to make that school as a pilot school. Wherever you are, that's going to be the first year for that school, K through six. So, it will be kind of ours to build and make the best.
>
> Wherever you are, that's going to be the first year for that school, K through six...Especially since H_[school] has such a bad reputation as a junior high, that we can make it maybe the best K through sixth

> elementary school, whoever's there, you know. To be able to take that first year and make something out of it.

Question 4: What concerns do you have about the impact of this restructuring on the students, community and/or teachers?

Ten themes represented teachers' concerns about the impact of restructuring, and of these, three themes were the most frequently mentioned: (a) potential resegregation, (b) fear of change, and (c) teacher morale. Potential resegregation was the strongest theme, with teachers expressing concern that the inequities of the old, segregated school system will resurface. Fear of change was expressed by comments such as, "I think next year is going to really be hard on teachers, students, everybody, because it's going to be just change, change, change." Referring to the big adjustments that children, parents, teachers, and administrators will face as the new organizational structure is implemented. Concern about teacher morale grew out of teachers' lack of information about, and involvement in, the restructuring process. As one teacher expressed it:

> And I mean, I know right now it's like, "OK, Lord, just put me where I'm supposed to be, but you know, let me be with some of

> my peers that I've been working with for the last four years." And you know I think that would be too hard on everyone to be pulled out of a situation that they've been in for four, five, ten years, and stuck somewhere in a brand new school all by themselves...I don't know if anybody has any influence over that or not, but that would just...I just think that would be real negative. I just don't think that would work out well.

The remaining seven themes were: (a) lack of administrative and community support, (b) impact on students, (c) inflexibility, (d) safety, (e) opportunities for teacher collaboration, (f) cultural mismatch between teacher and school, and (g) negative image of some schools. Teachers expressed concern about a lack of support and cooperation from both the administration and the community. Comments by teachers related to the impact on students indicated concern about students moving to new schools which may be located some distance away from their current set of friends. The concerns coded inflexibility came from teachers' comments that since students will be attending one school from grades K-6, those students who are <u>not</u> experiencing success may be at a disadvantage because there will not be the

opportunity to change schools. Teachers expressed concerns about the safety of students who will walk to school and concerns that there might not be opportunities for teacher collaboration and socialization in the new school setting. Possible cultural mismatches between teachers and schools and the negative image of some schools centered around the concern that teachers who do not reside in the community surrounding the neighborhood school to which they are assigned will need special help,

> ...because if you're a teacher and you have been working in a school that mirrors your community, it may be a little difficult for you to go into a [new] community and a school that mirrors that [new] community and work there. If you haven't been used to working with diverse populations, it may present a challenge, so, the district school administrators should be open to providing whatever components are necessary to helping teachers be comfortable with this change so there should probably be some staff development in place to help teachers.

and that pre-existing negative images about some neighborhoods will affect the attitudes of students and parents:

> And the connotation with that school is negative. I mean it's just—. I mean, I don't know why, but its negative right now. I'm

> not saying the school is negative, but, you know, a person's reaction to it is usually a negative one. So, the parents will have to encourage their children to come to school or to go to school, rather, and, you know, let them know that, "Well, it's not J_____[school]. It's not J_____[school] anymore. You have a new school." And they will have to really build, wherever their child will be, they'll have to build that school up for the child because if the child doesn't want to be there, that will create a problem for the teacher, as well. And the parents, and the community.

Question 5: What is the multicultural curriculum that is currently being implemented and how will the new school organization affect this?

Three main categories emerged from teachers' comments about multicultural education and how it might be affected by the new school organization; the categories were labeled: a) perceptions about the nature of multicultural education; b) teacher knowledge and understanding; and c) reaction to and effect of reorganization on multicultural education. Within each of the three categories, several themes were evident. With regard to teachers' perceptions about the nature of multicultural education, there were five themes: (a) ethnic studies, (b) acceptance of differences, (c) the contributions

approach, (d) the additive approach, and (e) character education. The most frequently mentioned themes were ethnic studies, acceptance of differences, and the contributions approach.

Teachers' descriptions of multicultural education as being the opportunity to learn about other selected ethnic groups, using literature and units of study, reflected an Ethnic Studies perspective. Some teachers described multicultural education as recognizing and accepting differences between groups of people. Some teachers viewed multicultural education as being what Banks (1994) has labeled the contributions approach which "focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements" (p. 25). Also, some teachers held a perspective of multicultural education as being what Banks (1994) has labeled the additive approach in which "content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure" (Banks, 1994, p. 25). Multicultural education as being synonymous with character education (i.e., a common set of values purported to be held by all people)

was addressed only by one teacher (who teaches a behavior disorder class).

Five themes emerged with regard to teacher knowledge and understanding of multicultural education: (a) uncertainty about multicultural content and breadth of subject, (b) cultural deprivation paradigm, (c) demonstrating nervousness about the topic, (d) acknowledging the need for more training/professional development, and (e) desire to share experiences and perspectives. Of these themes, the two most frequently mentioned themes were uncertainty about multicultural content and breadth of subject and the cultural deprivation paradigm.

Teachers who expressed uncertainty about multicultural content and breadth of subject were unable to articulate what the school's multicultural curriculum is, as indicated by the statement "I don't know how to explain it." A cultural deprivation paradigm was indicated by teachers who believe that schools must compensate for the supposedly-deprived backgrounds of minority students, especially those from low income families (Banks, 1994).

Teachers who demonstrated nervousness about the topic had no apparent knowledge at all and their brief comments were accompanied by nervous laughter. Some teachers stated that staff development is needed in this area. Two teachers stated that multicultural education is the desire to share perspectives and experiences, pointing out the importance of interacting with all people as a way of learning that culture comes from everyday experiences, that are often common across cultural groups.

Regarding the effect of reorganization on multicultural education, three themes were identified: (a) bonding and mixing of groups, (b) claims there will be no difference/remain the same, and (c) uncertainty about the outcome. The need for bonding and mixing of groups was evident in teachers' comments about the importance of having both European American and African American teachers in all neighborhood schools so that development of cross-cultural understandings is possible.

> ...in the past, before integration, we had, like African-American teachers mostly in the schools with African-American children, and I think now, in a school like T_we'll have a high number of white children, and

> there will be African-American teachers there, too. So I think they'll bond and mix that way, you know?...And I think the African-American teachers can offer the white children things, and then vice-versa...

One African American teacher also expressed concern that she had never taught a European American student:

> I need to know how to communicate with a Caucasian student like I am communicating with my black students and my Hispanic student. I'm getting that experience now. And I hadn't ever taught Hispanic students before. I didn't know what to do. But I got that this year, but I'm still missing the Caucasians. I have never taught one. I really feel like, with my classroom next year or whatever, I'm hoping that I do get more Caucasian students in my class so that, you know, I can do what I have to do to bring in, you know, other cultural differences and diversity among students.

Several teachers claimed that the reorganization will make no difference in the multicultural education curriculum because character education is in place. Teachers expressing uncertainty about the outcome suggested that the ethnic composition of the student population may influence the way multicultural education is taught.

Implications/Recommendations

The following implications are suggested by the findings of this inquiry.

- Teachers should be involved continuously in all aspects of the decision-making process related to the transition into a neighborhood school structure.

- A formal system for developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the community and the various neighborhood schools must be established and maintained, deriving support from the governing officials of the city.

- The school district should actively solicit ideas and concerns from all segments of the community about any proposed change to the organizational structure, and conversely, should clearly and frequently communicate the district's vision, mission, and values associated with the transition into a neighborhood school structure.

- Professional development should be both site-based, emanating from the particular needs of each school, and district-wide to maintain the unity of the larger community.

- Training in multicultural education based on current, acknowledged theories and research should be made available to teachers and administrators so that the

essence of multicultural education is infused throughout the school district.

- The welfare of the students should be the basis for all decisions about organization, curriculum, and instruction.

- The schools must develop a family-centered environment where parents and guardians become important partners in the educational process.

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